

Gare Montparnasse

Part 1

Gare Montparnasse.

A train station that opened in the late nineteenth century, but obviously has been renovated since. The whole place appears to be modernized structure; mostly glass and shiny metal. The inside consists of concrete, advertising banners, and a whole lot of the color red.

None of the people in this airport are understandable-- besides occasional tourists who I can't seem to approach soon enough or at all-- so I suppose asking for help would be useless. Rosetta Stone can never do justice to the majestic language, as I have told my parents exactly fifty-one times since I had the idea of leaving the United States-- and America, altogether. Like I'd expected from time number one, I did not bother to start learning French until I was on the plane. The couple next to me were quiet enough that I didn't need to turn up the volume on my computer too high.. They didn't exactly *allow* me to take the window seat, unfortunately. One of the men, the one with a really deep voice, who seemed to not have been in the air ever before, nearly demanded to be able to see out the window in case he gets motion sickness. He's afraid of heights and motion. Go figure.

His boyfriend was incredibly happy when the now mind-blown newbie refrained from pushing me and my laptop carry-on to the ground. The view wasn't so worth fighting back; I've traveled by plane enough times before.

In spite of the eight hours falling asleep, waking up, falling asleep, waking up, learning a new language, and listening in on my seat-mates' conversations (I now know their names-- Harold and Lou, both born in England. Turns out Harold has flown countless times before, he just finds each time equally as fascinating. I found joy in watching one start rambling while the other casually watches in adoration.), the arrival in Paris holds as the most pleasing few minutes I'd witnessed yet. It hadn't quite hit me by then that Paige Turner, seventeen-year-old artist-to-be who was reluctant to even buy a *sketchbook* over a year ago, is in France, alone. This is experience; this is pure, extraordinary adventure and wanderlust being followed.

Lou rested his palm lightly on my shoulder, near my neck, and hugged me. Harold broke out of his anxious gazing and joined the group huddle, wishing me good luck. "Stay in touch?" he asked, looking to his boyfriend for permission. Lou nodded and pulled out his phone. "I think we'd like to be at your first showcase," one of my new friends commented, politely reminding me of my sketches I openly worked on at some point during the eight hours. "Or book signing. Whatever it turns out to be, you'll see us."

I handed the iPhone back and they linked hands. They walked off to collect their luggage and I stood there, trying to elongate this moment to the best of my abilities.

“Paige Turner?” a feminine voice gains my attention and the first thing I see is her relieved smile. “Yvonne David. After video-chatting you don’t think I’d miss the red hair, do you?”

Part 2

“*Gare Montparnasse*,” she says, laughing, “Literally, it means ‘Montparnasse Station.’ Who *knows* what or who Montparnasse is?”

“Although irrelevant because I will be guiding you, my home, and yours for the month, is down that street--” she points toward a busy road on my left that closely resembles a highway, “--and far enough down that the rest I will show you. But at least you now know the important pinpoints are all connected to the same street.”

“How far are all of the places I need to be from here?” My voice is raspy since I haven’t talked much. Yvonne didn’t mind; she has probably been the translator and guide enough times for tourists to see when someone just wants to bask in Europe’s fast-paced artistry instead of talking about what they left behind in their home countries. Plus. I did get to know her, and her, me. over video-chatting and emailing.

“Like I said, I will be guiding you. I’m here for a reason.” She calms me with another smile. I redirect my eyes to the station.

“What time is it?”

She checks her bright lilac watch. “Quarter before midnight. Tired?”

“No, but I should be.”

Her hip bumps mine playfully before she says, “‘Should’ is a dangerous term. Do you want to be asleep?” I shrug. “Then I’ll show you around.”

“Aren’t *you* tired?” This is still late for her.

“There is no time or place to start seeing Paris! If you have never been here, unless you are in need of sleep, you go! Spend every second. I can hold it out for another hour; don’t worry about it.” I almost cut her off to say that her sleep schedule is more important than me drooling over whatever we can tour in less than an hour.

“Paige, if you’re in need of a sign that this is your time to shine, I’m giving you the whole billboard right this second. Take the chance.”

Part 3

A collage of graceful string instruments accompany my waking up the next morning. I open my eyes after a few seconds, enjoying the relaxing alarm. What I see is my guide and translator turned to me with her dark index finger holding down an iHome snooze button. She is fully dressed in a purple blazer and khakis that almost match the color of her flats. “Up, c’mon! You’ve got a job to start!” she says, now shuffling towards

me and beaming, knowing how thrilled I am. "I went through your suitcase because I saw how badly you were struggling to put clothes together last night. You have some really cute stuff, by the way!" I almost burst out laughing at how joyful she is until I witness her definition of a first day outfit.

"Yvonne," I gasp, tugging over the rosy comforter and guest bed sheets. "You put clothes together way better than I ever could have."

"You're welcome." I notice how her smirk and gracious green eyes cancel each other out. She's not one to be so modest, and that's great.

"What's the time?" We have to be at the art therapy group by nine thirty, I know. But my brown American watch is not aware that one a.m. means something different in this time zone.

"Seven. I figured I'd give you plenty of time to shower, apply makeup if you're into that, and we can stop by a café for breakfast." Grabbing my toiletries and today's attire and following Yvonne's directions to where everything is in the house, I am well on my way to my young career, and day two of thirty has begun.

Part 4

Not a question about European culture lingers as we cascade from one narrow boulevard to the next. Yvonne eagerly explains the whole shebang and when we reach a sit-down café, she even lets me sketch. "I'll order," she tells me and sits. I try to stand back where I would be able to view the entire green awning without causing pedestrian traffic. "*Excuse-moi*," I whisper while moving a padded chair, not feeling confident in my bilingual skills. I forget about the chair and move about five feet. "*Les Deux Magot*," I read off golden letters.

Yvonne calls me over, and I'm surprised to find two pages already filled with almost-cartoonish depictions of my current surroundings. We marvel at the work over coffee, eggs, and toast. I lay my phone on the metal table and check my emails. I expect messages from my parents, Diana, Longo and Jules, and my boyfriend Gabe. Diana turns out to be the only person who didn't send me anything. I snap photographs of my drawings, the shop, Yvonne and me, and finally the cars racing by us. The pictures deliver, letting my loved ones know although I miss them, I am feeling fantastic. Then we are up and moving again.

Part 5

There are no others walking in or out, so I guess everyone's already inside.

The intimacy of the victorian that supposedly hosts year-round classes first strikes me, then suggests warmth and coziness that must be convenient for its patients. Yvonne nudges me towards closer to where I'll be working. Earlier, she told me about her interning at an art therapy group in 2005. The stories made me feel less worrisome

and frantic. I'm not interning, rather I'm here for the experience (and my college résumé). Also, she had done art therapy with severe PTSD children, while mine serves senior citizens with dementia.

"*Maître Leclerc?*" she announces. Of course the teacher has a French title. Why didn't I expect that? I hope he understands my lack of ability to pronounce foreign names correctly. "Remember: 'May-tru Lu-clair,'" she tells me, sensing my mental face-palm. I thank her.

"*Dans ici!*" a low, masculine shout leads us to the largest wooden door in the hallway.

Maître Leclerc is a tall, intimidating man. He probably bumps his head in the doorway a lot. He seems like the type to growl and get irritated easily, but when he turns around and sees Yvonne and me, all my expectations dissolve along with my high-risen shoulders. I can't help but feel acknowledged and appreciated in his presence, and there's no doubt everyone in the room shares that impression of the beautiful man.

"*Vieil ami! Je vous ai manqué,*" Yvonne says. I recognize the words "friend," "I," and "you" in the phrase, so I figure they have met before.

"*Yvonne, je ne savais pas que tu serais là si tôt! Est-ce Paige?*" he responds. I take a step out of a nonexistent shadow when they both turn to me.

"*Oui. Robin, j'aimerais que vous rencontriez Paige Turner. Elle a dix-sept, de l'Amérique, et sera d'aider votre classe pour le mois prochain,*" Yvonne proudly states, most likely introducing me. I really am not sure. Next thing I know, Maître Leclerc is praising me in French and I am left speechless because I do not know how to respond. I turn to Yvonne in panic.

"He said he loves your name, your hair is spontaneously vibrant, and he cannot wait to start working with you." Then she taps Maître Leclerc's arm and pries him away from me. I'm blushing. "*Faites attention. Elle ne sait pas le français. Seulement en anglais. C'est pourquoi je suis ici.*" The lanky, certainly older gentleman's grin falters for a moment. He mumbles to my translator then she tells me he was "hoping to pick my young brain." It looks like I won't *not* be blushing today.

Part 6

"*Las Mademoiselle?*"

I turn around, knowing I'm the only "Miss" watching over the class. My eyes skim over six-or-so heads before instantaneously identifying a pair of hauntingly blue eyes staring right at me. The eyes' owner's expression is polite, and his head is bald. He isn't as shaky as the other patients. He just looks curious and, well... polite. I walk over and wait for him to speak again.

"*Pouvez-vous me prenez un pinceau plat?*" he requests, playing with the hairs on a molting flat brush. I glance at his easel, trying to see if there's an issue or he's just being shy.

"*Je ne peux pas parler français, seulement en anglais...*" I utter a phrase I have studied for weeks in case of a situation like this, spinning my head around. Wait, the teacher doesn't speak English either. Yvonne left at the beginning! Why didn't-- The man chuckles from next to me.

"I hadn't heard you speak with Maître before. My apologies." He's still laughing. "I asked if you could get another flat brush. This one is at the end of its days." I am bewildered by the sudden amount of English in this room. I back up and search the can of brushes I was given in case I wanted to draw something myself. I find a flat brush identical (without the molting) to the one given to this considerate sir. He thanks me and continues painting. I take note of his French accent, which is not as thick as Maître Leclerc's.

"Why do you know English?" I blurt. He guffaws again.

"I've traveled much."

"How much?"

He thinks this through briefly, paused from tinting his canvas silver. "In the past eighty years, more than a hundred times; at least thirty to the United States of America."

My eyes widen. "On business?"

"Sure."

"For personal reasons," I state, getting the hint that he isn't up to discuss.

"Oh, no, not really." I lift my head, completely confused. "My name is Hugo Cabret. I am a mechanic and filmmaker's apprentice. I was only an apprentice for Georges Méliès, the greatest filmmaker who ever lived-- for both his personality and his works in the earliest times of cinema." I almost fell off a stool I don't recall sitting down on. Mister Cabret stunned me, off-guard and dazzled by his history. "The six years I worked for him were magnificent. I am sure we both were the biggest changes in each other's lives. I was twelve."

"You seem to remember this with ease. You sure you have dementia?" I tease, questioning his mental health.

"Ha! I'm not actually sure. I think I just get stuck in the glory days a little more than considered healthy." A worrisome emotion flashes in his eyes, and I feel I'm being thrown into whatever he's thinking about. He stares at his rough wrists, rotating them and releasing the tension. I hear him utter under his breath, "Isabelle wouldn't be so proud." I don't interrogate.

"I'll be back," he says. I help him out of his chair, supporting his weak spine. He straggles out of the dim room. I take this chance to sit where he was, to envision being Hugo Cabret, creative man at work. I pick up a dry wooden brush and close my eyes, pretending to be composing upon the air. Spinning on the specially-made chair, I rise from my dazed state and drop the paintbrush. It clatters when it hits the floor but I hardly notice or pay any attention. Coating Hugo's canvas is a charcoal sky, white and smoky clouds framing at the periphery, and a fluorescent, detailed moon in the center. The moon has a human face among the many craters that sticks out its tongue, and a bullet-shaped rocket emerges from the face's right eye. Hugo's painting is incredible. So this is what he imagines from "the glory days"? This brilliance is what his mind is filled with?

In the lower right corner of Hugo Cabret's illustration is a thinly composed signature that reads, "Georges Méliès".